

BELARUS DESERVES BETTER

HON. SAM GEJDENSON

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 20, 1999

Mr. GEJDENSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about the situation in Belarus—a country in which I have a great deal of personal interest and which I believe has a great deal of unrealized potential. My father was born and raised in Parafanyvo, Belarus when it was ruled by Poland before the Nazis invaded. He and his brother narrowly escaped the Nazi troops who massacred the rest of their family. They were hidden by two very brave families, and my father was later able to escape and eventually come to the United States.

Given this personal history, I have a great deal of admiration for the people of Belarus. Sadly, they have experienced a great deal of suffering over the years—as the victims of the Nazis, of Stalin, and of the Chernobyl disaster. I visited Belarus several weeks ago and it is clear to see that the people of Belarus are still getting a bad deal—again at the hands of their leadership.

Under the legitimate constitution of Belarus, President Aleksandr Lukashenka's term is scheduled to expire today. But regrettably, Lukashenka is not going anywhere. When dawn breaks in Minsk tomorrow, Lukashenka will be waking up at the Presidential residence.

For the last several years, Lukashenka has been wreaking havoc on his country, but tomorrow, he officially becomes Belarus' illegitimate president. In the fall of 1996, Lukashenka used bogus tactics to impose a new constitution on Belarus, to abolish the existing parliament and replace it with a rubber-stamp legislature, and to give himself an extra couple of years in office.

Lukashenka is dangerous. Among other things, he has expressed admiration for both Hitler and Stalin. He has refused to acknowledge Stalin's crimes, even rejecting forensic evidence that thousands of doctors, professors, and other professionals were murdered by Stalin's forces at Kuropaty just outside of Minsk.

Lukashenka has created a climate of fear in Belarus. He has targeted the opposition, nongovernmental organizations, young people, and the press. Opposition figures have disappeared; independent newspapers are fighting for survival; and young people have reportedly been coerced to move to areas contaminated by the Chernobyl disaster.

Lukashenka has larger political ambitions. His rhetoric plays well with the most retrograde regions of Russia—the so called 'Red Belt.' He has been enthusiastically pushing for a union between Russia and Belarus. Such a union has been under discussion since 1996, but in recent weeks, the Russians too—for their own political purposes—seem to be pushing harder. Lukashenka was quoted earlier this month as suggesting that President Yeltsin could serve as president of the new union, and likely planning on an early Yeltsin departure from the scene—Lukashenka offered to serve as its Vice President.

Lukashenka is pushing his country deeper and deeper into an economic abyss. Prices remain under state control, and there has been

no privatization to speak of. The average monthly wage is somewhere around \$30 a month, and many people rely on subsistence farming in a backyard plot to feed their families.

The people of Belarus deserve better. Belarus suffered greatly during the Second World War. The war's legacy in Belarus was that it left a passive people—afraid to speak out for fear that they'd get a bullet in the back of the head. Years of Communist rule only exacerbated these feelings. During my visit, several villagers told me: "we are only 'malenki'—small people"—unable to affect the political process.

But Belarus is also home to many courageous people. For me personally, the most courageous are the women I met on my visit who at great risk to their own lives, hid my father and his brother from the Nazis in their home and in their barn.

Regrettably, Lukashenka is not going to go away tomorrow—as he should. But perhaps he is beginning to realize that he cannot continue on the present course.

There is a report out of Minsk that the OSCE special mission headed by Adrian Severin has announced that Lukashenka has agreed to hold free parliamentary elections in 2000 and enter a dialogue with the opposition. Let us hope that Lukashenka makes good on that promise.

In any case, the West should do what it can to support the people in Belarus who are willing to speak out and to help them plan for—and perhaps even hasten—the post-Lukashenka days. The West should:

Bolster the opposition by continuing to meet with the legitimately elected parliament. The U.S. is right to refuse to meet with the Lukashenka appointed rubber stamp parliament.

Provide more funding for those who are trying to battle passivity and fear. A small but vibrant NGO community in Belarus, with support from a handful of Western assistance organizations, is working to make citizens feel they can take control over issues that affect their own lives—like housing or the health of their children. Personal empowerment can lead to political empowerment.

Make clear that the future of both Belarus and Russia can be with the West. For Belarus, it is not a choice of Russia or the West. Offering a false choice pushes Belarus and Russia towards each other to our exclusion.

Continue to support private enterprise and democratic change in Russia itself. The more firmly these elements are rooted in Russia, the less likely it is that constituencies in Russia will be attracted to Lukashenka's brand of retrograde politics.

Continue to insist—as the Clinton Administration has been doing—that any integration between former Soviet states must reflect the voluntary will of the people expressed through the democratic process, must be mutually beneficial, and must not erect barriers to integration with the wider community of nations. As the Administration has rightly pointed out, since a democratic process does not now exist in Belarus, that calls into question the legitimacy of efforts to create a genuine Russian-Belarusian Union.

Weave a web of contacts with the West. Fund and encourage travel by Belarusians not only to the United States but to neighboring countries. The more they see of Lithuania and

Poland, the more they see what Belarus can be.

Support increased information flow into Belarus—including efforts by the Lithuanians and others to conduct radio broadcasts into Belarus.

In the end, Belarusians' fate is in their own hands. But even as Lukashenka clings to power, there is far more that the West can and should do to help tip the balance towards Belarus joining the democratic community of nations.

HONORING DR. GEORGE PAULIKAS

HON. STEVEN T. KUYKENDALL

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 20, 1999

Mr. KUYKENDALL. Mr. Speaker, on July 18, 1999, Dr. George Paulikas celebrated 50 years in the United States, during which he and his brothers have made significant contributions to their adopted homeland. The Paulikas family arrived as Lithuanian refugees in Boston Harbor on July 18, 1949, having escaped the atrocities of Josef Stalin and Adolf Hitler. George's brother Arvyd has worked for 34 years as a physicist at Argonne National Laboratories. His youngest brother Ray served in the United States Air Force and then continued his career at Lockheed-Sanders.

I honor George Paulikas today for his service to the United States. He retired in 1998 as Executive Vice President of the Aerospace Corporation, a career which spanned 37 years, and which has garnered him with numerous awards and commendations. He is the recipient of the National Reconnaissance Office Gold Medal, was named a General James Doolittle Fellow, served on the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board, was given the Aerospace Trustees Distinguished Achievement Award. He continues to serve as a Trustee of the Los Angeles Science Center and he sits on the Los Angeles Area Boy Scouts Council. He is the author of "Thirteen Years: 1936–1949", a book describing his family's journeys through war-torn Europe in their search for stability and freedom from the ravages of despotism and war. Our country has been enriched by George Paulikas' service to the United States of America, and we celebrate with him on this 50th anniversary of his family's passage to freedom.

A TRIBUTE TO MARILYN BEYES

HON. JOHN SHIMKUS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 20, 1999

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this time to commend Marilyn Beyes of Smithboro, Illinois for her unparalleled volunteer activity in the community. She travels 18 miles almost every day to work as a volunteer at a number of community establishments. Marilyn may be seen laying ten-pound bricks in the Fayette County Museum Garden or organizing an art show with over 250 entries and 350 people in attendance.

When asked about why she puts in such long hours as a volunteer she said, "I see a